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ABSTRACT

The study reported is a replication of Henry Mintzberg's study of five executives at work to determine the scope of their job-related activities. For this study superintendents in three suburbs contiguous to a large midwestern city were observed at work for one week, including evening meetings when they were scheduled. An attempt was made to record completely and objectively everything that occurred. The prominent propositions arising from Mintzberg's investigations were (1) managers work at an unrelenting pace; (2) managerial activities are characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation; (3) managers gravitate toward the more active elements of their work; (4) managers demonstrate a strong attraction to verbal media; and (5) managers maintain communication relationships with three groups--superiors, outsiders, and subordinates. These propositions are discussed within the framework of the structure of superintendents' everyday activities, the characteristics of their work, and their network of contacts. The findings suggest that the structure and content of the superintendents' everyday activities are very similar to the activities of other chief executives in public and private organizations. (Author/MLF)

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University of Oregon

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PREFACE

What do managers do? The classical notion of management suggests that a manager systematically plans, organizes, coordinates, and controls. Many responsibilities which managers must assume, however, fail to fit one of the above categories. When an executive presents a plaque to a retiring employee, for example, (s)he is not planning, organizing, or controlling.

Because the classical notion of management does not describe what a manager actually does, Henry Mintzberg observed five executives at work to better determine the scope of their job-related activities.

The study reported herein is a replication of Mintzberg's study with a specific type of manager--the suburban school superintendent. Data were collected on the characteristics of superintendents' work, their network of contacts, and the distribution (frequency and type) of their activities. The findings suggest that the structure and content of the superintendents' everyday activities are very similar to the activities of other chief executives in public and private organizations.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Oregon School Study Council

"...So Go the Days of Their Lives"

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

What do superintendents do? How is their time organized? Where do they spend their time? With whom do they interact? These were the questions which guided a study based on the direct observation of superintendents in three suburbs contiguous to a large midwestern city.¹ Each superintendent was "shadowed" (observed) at work for one week which included evening meetings when they were scheduled. An attempt was made to record completely and objectively everything that occurred. The points of focus were:

1. observed behavior (not traits or capacities of the superintendent);
2. descriptions of behavior--frequency and type (not evaluations of behavior); and
3. behavior of the superintendent only (not other positions in the school district).

What was revealed is not an exotic story. Superintendents met with a variety of individuals and organizations--subordinates, school board members, peers and professional organizations, clients (parents and

¹All superintendents were in their first superintendency with tenures ranging from one to six years. The school district enrollments ranged from 1500 to 5000 students in grades K through 12.

students), suppliers and associates (university professors, representatives of nongovernmental agencies, and salesmen), regulatory agencies, and independents (community citizens and those who do not fall into the other categories). These contacts were initiated by the superintendents 56 percent of the time. In general, all of the superintendents' activities (phone calls, desk work, meetings, and tours) were brief and fragmented; 60 percent lasted less than 9 minutes; only 6 percent exceeded one hour.

The pattern of superintendent activities is rather ordinary executive behavior and corresponds to the behavior of five executives in a similar study undertaken by Henry Mintzberg (1973).² The prominent propositions arising from Mintzberg's investigations were: (1) managers work at an unrelenting pace; (2) managerial activities are characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation; (3) managers gravitate toward the more active elements of their work; (4) managers demonstrate a strong attraction to verbal media; and (5) managers maintain communication relationships with three groups—superiors, outsiders, and subordinates (1973, pp. 29-48). These propositions will be discussed within the framework of: (1) the structure of superintendents' everyday activities, (2) the characteristics of their work, and (3) their network of contacts.

²The five executives of Mintzberg's study included: a manager of a consulting firm, the president of an industrial technological products firm, a manager of a hospital, a manager of a consumer goods firm, and a school superintendent of a suburban district.

The Structure of Superintendents' Work

The three subject superintendents worked a combined total of 129 hours during the three weeks of observation. While the average superintendent work week was 43 hours, one superintendent was observed to work 36 hours and another 52½ hours. In addition to the data collected during the observation phase of the research, superintendents were asked to describe their typical working day plus specify any weekends or evenings in which they engaged in work-related activities. The responses of the superintendents are congruent with Steven Knezevich's survey which indicates that superintendents of districts of comparable size report working a total of 55 hours per week (1971, p. 56). Mintzberg (1973), Carlson (1951), and Whyte (1948) suggest that managers seldom stop thinking about their work. A similar conclusion can be derived from the following responses of the subject superintendents:

Superintendent A--I am in the office approximately 35 hours per week. . . . I come to work about 9:00 a.m. (unless I have a scheduled meeting, like today I met with the negotiator for the teachers at 7:45) and leave around 4:30 p.m. Usually I take an hour and a half for lunch. Today I will not take that long because I have a meeting with a parent. . . . The board gives me a half day off per week to write, play golf or consult; and I take it. The board also gives me 30 days off, or six weeks, a year. I don't take more than 3 weeks at a time, and I can leave virtually on a moment's notice. I don't take any reading--professional journals--home in the evening. I spend many hours thinking about this place, where it is going . . . excluding nightmares, I probably spend 60 hours per week doing the job of superintending . . . I am a human being masquerading as a superintendent. . . . I experience some role conflict when I must enact the figure head role.

Superintendent B--I come to the office usually between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m.; spend the day in the office or a meeting; probably take 45 minutes for lunch; go home probably between

5:00 and 5:30 p.m.; and have at least three meetings a week usually from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Board meetings, of course, last longer. During the school year, you have to attend all the football games if possible, basketball games, and a couple of wrestling matches. I do very poorly on attending baseball games. I do not work on Saturdays. I tend to work at home on Sunday on school related things . . . mostly paper-work, organizing what I am going to do for the week . . . writing memos, maybe . . . lots of time financial things, budgets . . . things that really cannot be interrupted. I take home work every night. Sometimes I spend maybe an hour or two, and that is all . . . depends on how I feel . . . usually things I ought to do for the next day . . . reading.

Superintendent C--I guess the last few years I have considered myself on duty all the time. I arrive at work early in the morning around 7:00 a.m.; I have breakfast after I arrive. In other words, I get things started and then leave here at ten minutes till 8 and return around 8:30, and stay through the day. Usually every evening . . . no, that's not fair . . . four evenings a week I try to attend as many meetings and functions . . . as you get into the school year apparently four evenings are enough . . . these are usually ceremonial duties, making an appearance somewhere, a banquet or a meeting. Sometimes it is participatory decision-making, but it tends to lean toward the observing kind of role . . . attending a school play, PTA meeting, that kind of thing. I would suggest that four or five times a month I have to lead some kind of meeting. I usually try to avoid work related activity on Sunday. We may sometimes entertain people on Sunday who have, in one way or another, something to do with the school district or schools in general. Saturday . . . typically I'll work all Saturday morning, and then during the school year there is usually some kind of function to attend.

Sune Carlson suggests that this pace has certain harmful effects, including intellectual isolation and limited opportunities for friendships (1951, p. 75).

Superintendents, however, indicated unique ways for combating this isolation. One superintendent reported reading current novels and pseudo-psychological works (he named Passage) and spending spare time on his

boat. Another enjoyed "catching the latest movies, preferably comedies and not the serious type of the late sixties."

Although Mintzberg found "no break in the pace of activity during office hours" (1973, p. 30), the superintendents seemed to be in control, whenever possible, of this pacing. Superintendents left the office for breakfast or coffee, ran official and personal errands, or made observational tours when time alone or just a slowed down pace was needed. Superintendents came in later the morning following a board meeting and sometimes left earlier in the afternoon, as well. This was done only occasionally--and was balanced with those days the superintendent skipped lunch--but seemed to be one of the perquisites of the job.

Mintzberg documents the pace of activity of the five executives: "The mail, telephone calls, and meetings accounted for almost every minute from the moment these men entered their offices in the morning until they departed in the evenings" (1973, p. 30). The distribution of the superintendents' time is comparable to the five executives of Mintzberg's study. Each superintendent averaged 22 pieces of written communication, 10 phone calls, 9 meetings, and 1 tour per day as shown on Table 1 on page 6. The end of a scheduled meeting frequently became the beginning of an unscheduled meeting as subordinates quickly slipped into offices as doors opened. Two of the superintendents engaged in parallel processing--talked on the phone, opened mail, signed letters, met with other subordinates--while meeting with their administrative assistants.

The superintendents felt compelled to do a great amount of work, and the amount of available time was a critical factor in determining the

TABLE 1

ANALYSIS OF THE CHRONOLOGY RECORD - DISTRICTS COMPARED
BASED ON THREE WEEKS OF OBSERVATION

	SUPT. A	SUPT. B	SUPT. C	COMPOSITE
CATEGORY	(1 week)	(1 week)	(1 week)	total
Total Hours Worked	36 hr.	40 hr. 40 min.	52 hr. 30 min.	129 hr. 10 min.
Hours in Travel to Outside Meetings (not included)	0	45 min.	1 hr. 45 min.	2 hr. 30 min.
Hours of Evening Meetings (included)	8 hr. 30 min.	4 hr. 30 min.	10 hr. 30 min.	23 hr. 30 min.
Total Amount of Mail	45 pieces	152 pieces	78 pieces	325 pieces
Average Amount of Mail Processed Per Day	19 pieces	30 pieces	16 pieces	22 pieces
Total Number of Activities	122	158	158	438
<u>DESK WORK</u>				
Number of Sessions	37	52	38	127
Time on Desk Work	8 hr. 43 min.	9 hr. 56 min.	7 hr. 2 min.	25 hr. 41 min.
Average Duration	14 min.	11 min.	11 min.	12 min.
Proportion of Time	29%	24%	13%	20%
<u>TELEPHONE CALLS</u>				
Number of Calls	46	56	50	152
Time on Telephone	2 hr. 30 min.	4 hr. 47 min.	3 hr. 37 min.	10 hr. 54 min.
Average Duration	3 min.	5 min.	4 min.	4 min.
Proportion of Time	7%	12%	7%	8%
<u>SCHEDULED MEETINGS</u>				
Number of Meetings	13	19	24	56
Time in Meetings	16 hr. 30 min.	21 hr. 5 min.	27 hr. 57 min.	65 hr. 32 min.
Average Duration	76 min.	67 min.	70 min.	70 min.
Proportion of Time	46%	51%	53%	51%
<u>UNSCHEDULED MEETINGS</u>				
Number of Meetings	20	20	35	75
Time in Meetings	3 hr. 39 min.	3 hr. 56 min.	5 hr. 39 min.	13 hr. 14 min.
Average Duration	11 min.	12 min.	10 min.	11 min.
Proportion of Time	10%	10%	11%	10%
<u>TOURS</u>				
Number of Tours	6	4	5	15
Time on Tours	41 min.	27 min.	1 hr. 50 min.	2 hr. 58 min.
Average Duration	7 min.	7 min.	22 min.	12 min.
Proportion of Time	1%	1%	3%	2%
PROPORTION OF ACTIVITIES LASTING LESS THAN NINE MINUTES	61%	63%	61%	62%
PROPORTION LASTING LONGER THAN SIXTY MINUTES	7%	6%	5%	6%

- Heavy influx of employment inquiries screened by secretaries.

- Telephone calls screened or made by the secretary were excluded.

attention given to issues and problems.³ Mintzberg summarizes his interpretation of the rhythm of the managerial workday.

The work of managing an organization may be described as taxing. The quantity of work to be done, or that the manager chooses to do, during the day is substantial and the pace is unrelenting. After hours, the chief executive (and probably many other managers as well) appears to be able to escape neither from an environment that recognizes the power and status of his position nor from his own mind, which has been well trained to search continually for new information (1973, p. 30).

The question--why do managers have this pace and workload--logically arises out of these observations. Mintzberg posits that the manager's job is inherently open-ended:

The manager must always keep going, never sure when he has succeeded, never sure when his whole organization may come down around him because of some miscalculation. As a result, the manager is a person with a perceptual preoccupation. He can never be free to forget his job, and he never has the pleasure of knowing, even temporarily, that there is nothing else he can do. No matter what kind of managerial job he has, he always carries the nagging suspicion that he might be able to contribute just a little bit more. (1973, p. 30).

So it is with the superintendent's job. The open-ended nature of the superintendency, however, is further magnified by (1) the limited input received from the board of education, (2) the lack of evaluation of the superintendent's performance by the board, and (3) the unclear goals of the educational organization.

³This corresponds to Parkinson's Law which suggests, "Work expands so as to fill the time available for completion."

Limited Input from the Board of Education.

An analysis of the contacts with boards of education or individual board members accounts for 7 percent of the total number of verbal contacts and 16 percent of the total time spent in verbal contact as displayed on Table 2 on page 9. A large portion of the time spent with board members was in public board of education meetings, although exceptions were noted. In addition to the board of education meetings, superintendents interacted with members on a one-to-one basis. Superintendent B called individual board members daily prior to a board meeting which was to deal with a politically sensitive issue. Superintendent C met with individual board members on two occasions; he met with one newly elected member desiring a more definitive role in the school district, and attended a statewide meeting on pending financial legislation with another newly elected board member. Superintendent A received a phone call from a board member assuming an "influential parent" role; he questioned the computation of his daughter's grade point average. All three superintendents noted the inhibiting effect of Sunshine Laws⁴ on their contacts with the board.

Although superintendent-school board contacts were more frequent than contacts between the directors and managers of other organizations⁵, a

⁴Sunshine laws specify the conditions under which meetings must be open to the public.

⁵Mintzberg noted that executives spent 6 percent of their total number of verbal contacts and 7 percent of their time in verbal contact with directors. The superintendent of Mintzberg's study spent 11 percent of his total contacts and 17 percent of his time with the board of education.

TABLE 2

ANALYSIS OF THE SUPERINTENDENTS' VERBAL CONTACTS

	SUPT. A	SUPT. B	SUPT. C	COMPOSITE
Total Time in Verbal Contact	23h 47m	27h 40m	41h 49m	93h 16m
Total Number of Verbal Contacts	84	102	120	307
Media: % Contacts/ % Time				
Telephone Calls	51%/10%	55%/16%	43%/8%	49%/11%
Scheduled Meetings	16/71	18/67	24/74	20/71
Unscheduled Meetings	25/17	23/14	28/13	25/15
Encounters or Tours	7/2	4/2	4/4	5/3
Size: % Scheduled/ % Unscheduled/ % Tour				
(Based on Number of Contacts)	(41)	(46)	(52)	(139)
% With 2 People	10%/51%/10%	28% ^{100%} %	16%/41%/4%	18%/46%/7%
% With 3 People	10/--/--	--/7/2	6/7/1	5/5/1
% With 4 People	--/--/2	2/--/--	3/--/--	2/--/1
% With More Than 4 People	15/--/2	9/--/--	20/--/1	15/--/1
Participants: % Contact/ % Time				
Subordinate	82%/63%	72%/61%	66%/37%	73%/54%
Director	7/32	12/21	4/5	8/19
Peer/Trade Organization	2/1	4/10	8/10	5/7
Client	4/1	3/1	10/34	6/12
Supplier/Associate	1/3	4/3	3/1	3/2
Independent	4/1	5/3	8/12	6/5
Form of Initiation: %				
(Based on Number of Contacts)				
Superintendent	40%	65%	63%	56%
Opposite Party	52	32	35	40
Mutual	2	1	2	2
Clock	5	2	0	2
Location: % Contacts/ % Time				
Superintendent's Office	78%/38%	91%/69%	78%/37%	82%/48%
Office of Subordinate	5/2	1/1	3/1	3/1
Hall or Building in District	6/9	5/6	11/24	7/13
Conference or Board Room	11/51	2/16	4/14	6/27
Away from Organization	--/--	1/8	5/24	2/11
Purpose of Contact: % Contacts/ % Time				
Organizational Work				
Scheduling	14/3	9/2	11/2	11/2
Ceremony	2/8	1/1	7/29	3/13
External Board Work	--/--	--/--	3/1	1/--
TOTAL SECONDARY	17%/12%	5%/1%	6%/1%	9%/5%
Status Request and Solicitations	5/13	5/1	6/1	5/5
Actions Requests	8/3	9/2	4/1	7/2
Manager Requests	14/3	13/10	15/2	14/5
TOTAL REQUESTS AND SOLICITATIONS	27%/7%	26%/13%	25%/4%	26%/8%
Observation Tours	2/2	--/--	3/4	2/2
Receiving Information	13/6	14/5	8/6	12/6
Giving Information	18/16	14/12	8/6	13/12
Review	12/7	24/34	27/29	21/23
TOTAL INFORMATIONAL	45%/30%	53%/51%	46%/46%	48%/42%
Strategy	6/30	8/31	7/16	7/26
Negotiation	6/22	2/2	1/2	3/9
TOTAL DECISION-MAKING	12%/52%	10%/34%	8%/19%	10%/35%

- Superintendent C was observed during a week in which the board of education did not formally meet. Also, school district C settled with the teachers organization in January, whereas, the others were engaged in negotiations during the observation phase.

- Contacts with secretaries were counted in the observation.

limited number of written and verbal contacts were initiated by board of education members which clarified their expectations for the position or guided the work of the superintendent. (All superintendents suggested that agreements made during their employment interviews initially established guidelines for their work.) This was not surprising in light of the studies which show that the role of the superintendent is influenced by the socioeconomic status of his community. Further, superintendents manage information and rely on their expertise and superior knowledge of situations to influence boards (Minar, 1966). The boards in these districts were inclined to validate the superintendent's action and to be concerned primarily with board policy issues.

The notion that superintendents have, by any measure, a great amount of initiative and control is supported by Harmon Zeigler, et al. (1974). Zeigler notes that the superintendent emerges as the dominant actor in the agenda setting at school board meetings which puts him in a powerful position:

Whoever decides what will be discussed also tends to establish the boundaries and the rules of discussion. The power to limit the topics and policy alternatives which will be entertained gives the controller of the agenda considerable power in determining what policies will be adopted (1977, p. 241).

The superintendents in each of these districts prepared the agendas for board meetings. Superintendents and the boards of education appeared to be constrained by interdependence.

Each has a near monopoly on a resource of potential value, but each is able to take only limited action except in concert with the other. The board has formal policy-making authority, but must depend almost entirely upon the

superintendent for the information and technical expertise necessary to develop educational policy and to translate general policy into specific educational outputs. Reciprocally, the superintendent lays claim to the essential expertise required to formulate educational policy, but must rely upon the board to legitimate and achieve community support for policy decision. Without at least tacit board approval, authoritative policy decisions are tenuous or impossible. No superintendent, no matter how dominant, can completely escape dependence upon the school board (Boss, et al., 1977, p. 257).

A superintendent's knowledge, professional stature, duration in office, and staff assistance, however, are factors which tend to enhance the role of the superintendent in the governing process. The board is almost totally dependent on data gathered, interpreted, and presented by the superintendent and his staff, on alternatives and priorities established by them, and on their specific policy recommendations. The superintendent is in an awkward position. While he exerts initiative and control, he often lacks information about how well he is doing. Particularly conspicuous was the lack of formal evaluation of the superintendent's performance.

The Lack of Evaluation of the Superintendent.

The superintendents were asked to respond to the following statements:

1. I am told how well I am doing my job, and
2. I do not know if my work will be acceptable to the board.

Only one of the three superintendents was formally evaluated by his board. The superintendent who received a recent formal evaluation was confident that the board believed he was doing a good job. This lack of formal evaluation created uncertainty for the man in the position. One superintendent, reflecting upon the perceived insecurity of the position,

remarked, "The only major education innovation which has persisted over the years is: Fire the superintendent!"

The Unclear Goals of Schools.

The unclear goals of educational organizations and the local control of school districts (Cohen, et al., 1972 and Weick, 1976), also contribute to the open-ended nature of the job.⁶ Superintendent B felt that written goals and objectives tied him down too much and added, "We [the board and superintendent] have talked about them but have never set down written goals." Superintendent A indicated he formulated a few objectives in his mind. He commented on Superintendent C's list of objectives [which one of his board members brought to him after attending a recent area council meeting]: "We do those things; we just don't state them as objectives."

Superintendent C, on the other hand, operates under an extensive list of objectives formulated by the staff, school board, and community. These objectives worked as temporal markers--they became important to keep track of what was going on; they marked beginnings and endings of achievements, specified decision points, and formed a basis for interaction between the superintendent and subordinates. Objectives gave reason for social occasions (unscheduled and scheduled meetings, phone calls, and tours) in which information, directions, support, or other values were exchanged. The process of setting objectives helped co-opt the community,

⁶Social expectations for schools include: eliminating ordinary illiteracy in reading, writing, and arithmetic; assuring graduates are employable; reducing racial and sexual inequities; and improving the quality of life or the character of social mores.

staff and school board (Selznick, 1949) through joint goal setting, as well as serve as sensors of the environment and sources of feedback. An intense pace was maintained, nonetheless, as goals for the current 1977-78 year were completed and objectives for the 1978-79 school year were being formulated. At the June 1978 board of education meeting, forty-seven reports and a summary document of accomplishments were presented to the board. Within five minutes the board was asked to adopt the final draft of a new set of goals and objectives for the 1978-79 school year.

The written goals and objectives defined the superintendent's responsibilities and functioned as a basis for the school board to evaluate his performance (during the executive session of that particular board meeting).⁷ The objective setting process, although it reduced the open-ended nature of managerial tasks, did not appear to alter the quantity and pace of activities.

Mintzberg's claim is that the "unrelenting pace" is causally related to the open-ended nature of the job. Perhaps it is necessary to pursue what it is Mintzberg means by "unrelenting pace," since it is unclear. Typically one thinks of a factory worker, especially a piece-rate employee who is required to put out so many pieces per hour, as having a job with an unrelenting pace.⁸ My observations suggest that while superintendents are busy, they do not maintain an unyielding pace of activities. They

⁷The superintendent created the evaluation form with the assistance of the board president; the evaluation form was tied to the district's objectives.

⁸Evidence suggests, however, workers stockpile goods so as to break the monotony of their work.

experience periods of intensity and variety as well as depressed cycles of activity.

The Characteristics of Superintendents' Work

Mintzberg notes that the activities of managers are characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation. The superintendent encounters a wide variety of activities in a typical workday. The brevity of many of the superintendent's activities is evident in the distribution of activities by duration. Telephone calls were short, averaging 4 minutes; unscheduled meetings, desk work, and tours were longer, averaging 12 minutes; while scheduled meetings lasted, on the average, 70 minutes.

Managerial activities belie concentration of efforts according to Mintzberg; however, superintendents seemed to use the time available to them. This meant spending a great amount of time on something seemingly superficial to making important decisions swiftly and with incomplete knowledge. Time becomes an important resource to the manager—in this case, the superintendent. Unlike other organizational members, time need not be a constraining, but a potentially fluid, entity. Take for instance the teacher who is bound by rigid time and bell schedules and the academic year, to name a few boundaries established by time. The superintendent, in contrast, can stretch organizational time into the evening, the weekends, and through time normally construed as "vacations," that is, time away from teaching-learning activities. Time viewed in this light becomes something the superintendent can manipulate to pursue managerial activities.

The superintendents' activities require some kind of scheduling; primarily, they do one thing at a time. A majority of their interactions were dyadic; that is, they included the superintendent and one other participant. Superintendents use time and space as organizing frames for activities which Edward Hall terms "monochronic" or M-time which emphasizes schedules, segmentation, and promptness (1977, p. 17). On the other hand, under certain conditions superintendents allowed several things to happen at once. One superintendent was observed to process his mail and talk on the phone while meeting with one of his staff. A few days were characterized by several things happening at once and changes in important plans at the very last minute. Superintendents left meetings to meet with other people or to complete transactions. This solution to organizing activities is termed "polychronic" or P-time system which is typical in Latin American and Middle East countries.

Administrators, including superintendents, frequently cite "time"--not having enough time or wasting it--as a major impediment to accomplishing their work. Time management is frequently suggested as a "logical" solution for organizing administrators' time which segments activities much like the day of a student. This compartmentalization makes it possible to concentrate on one thing at a time; scheduling by its very nature selects what will and will not be perceived and attended to and permits only a limited number of events within a given period. In effect, what gets scheduled in or out constitutes a system for setting priorities. Hall points out that monochronic time is arbitrary and imposed; it is learned.

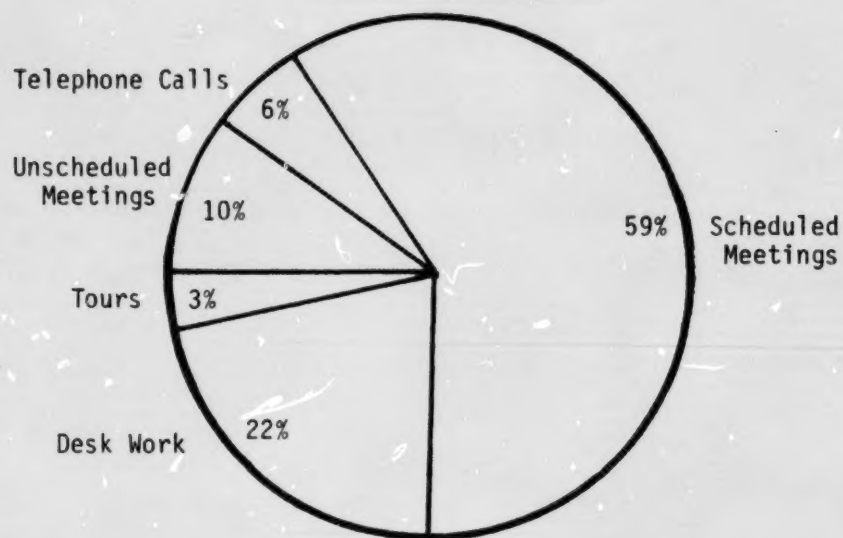
What is suggested is that under certain conditions P-time functions efficiently and effectively for superintendents.

Mintzberg argues that, with minor exceptions, there are no patterns to managerial activities (1973, p. 31). He waivers slightly, "Certain monthly and seasonal patterns exist in some managerial jobs, but there is little evidence of shorter term patterns in this study or in others" (1973, pp. 31-33). Those around the superintendent the most, for example the secretaries and administrative assistants, noted certain shifts in the content and intensity of activity as monthly board of education meetings approached. Secretaries reported attempting to get ahead of their work before board preparation began, and one administrative assistant reported not scheduling activities for the day before board meetings which freed him to handle last minute superintendent requests. The scope of this study does not justify making the claim that there is no pattern to managerial activities, nor is there sufficient evidence to suggest that there is. Further study is needed.

Preference for the Latest Information.

The desire to keep abreast of the latest events explains the superintendent's attraction to the verbal media of communication. An examination of the use of each form of communication by the three suburban superintendents is presented in Figure 1 on page 17. The five basic media are: written (documented communication), the telephone (verbal), the unscheduled meeting (informal face-to-face), the scheduled meeting (formal face-to-face) and the tour (visual). It is interesting to note that the

Distribution of Hours



Distribution of Number of Activities

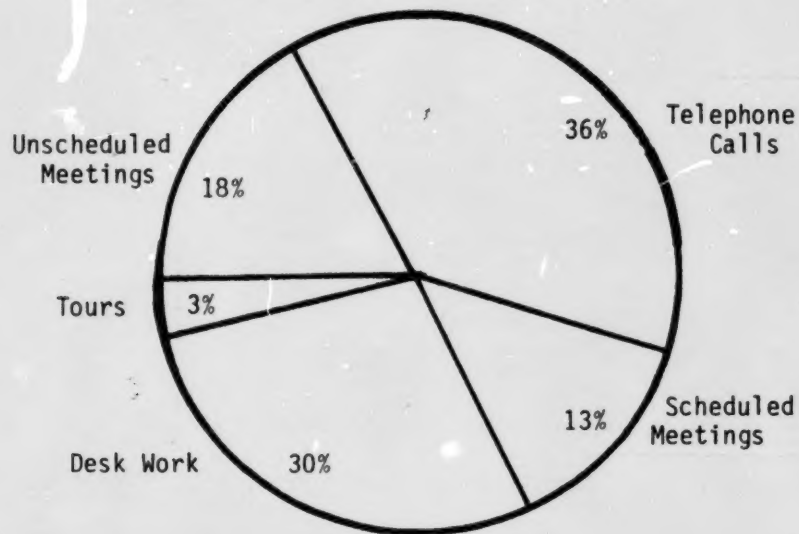


FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF TIME AND ACTIVITIES BY MEDIA*

*Based on three weeks of observation of superintendent's work.

distribution of hours among the five media is identical in the study of five executives by Mintzberg reported on Table 3.

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF TIME BY MEDIA
THE STUDIES COMPARED

	THREE SUPERINTENDENTS	MINTZBERG'S STUDY OF FIVE EXECUTIVES
<u>DISTRIBUTION OF HOURS</u>		
scheduled meetings	59%	59%
unscheduled meetings	10%	10%
tours	3%	3%
desk work	22%	22%
telephone calls	6%	6%
<u>DISTRIBUTION OF NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES</u>		
scheduled meetings	13%	19%
unscheduled meetings	18%	19%
tours	3%	5%
desk work	30%	33%
telephone calls	36%	24%

Why is it that superintendents prefer verbal media? The conjecture is superintendents can control these more readily; they receive more information through their use (e.g., non-verbal cues); and that sometimes it is preferable not to have a written record of events.

As previously noted, telephone calls and unscheduled meetings were of short duration. Together they accounted for one-half of the superintendents' activities. They were used when information had to be transmitted quickly. Superintendent C frequently used the conference call feature on his telephone to work out parent complaints with a principal or to schedule meetings with two people at the same time. His telephone was also equipped with a button which rang the phones in all school offices simultaneously; but to the observer's knowledge, he had not used this feature, yet.

Superintendents spent one fifth of their time engaged in desk work which amounted to "paperwork"--processing the mail they received, writing responses to requests, and initiating written communications. Most of the mail they received was unsolicited, and it received minimal attention. In all cases, secretaries sorted the mail; consequently, much of the "junk" was sifted out before the 269 pieces of mail reached the superintendents' desks during the three week observation period. Each piece of incoming mail was categorized into one of the twelve purpose categories developed by Mintzberg. Inconsequential requests--acknowledgments, status requests, solicitations, and reference data--made because of the superintendent's status accounted for 63 percent of the mail, another 31 percent came out of the following categories--reports, periodicals, events, internal operations, and ideas. Only 6 percent of the mail fits a third grouping which Mintzberg sees as of specific and immediate use to the managers. This included requests for authorization, advice on current situations, and pressures and problems brought to his attention through the mail.

Superintendents sent out 105 pieces of mail during the observation period which was an amount equal to 40 percent of the input received. Approximately 35 percent of the output was self-initiated, the remaining output was in reaction to letters received, primarily status requests (for example, the superintendent's written response to a request for a one year maternity leave of absence). Superintendents dictated their memos and letters; one notable exception was Superintendent B who composed memos to the board in longhand. Superintendent A, also, wrote a response to a report prepared by a graduate student. He explained that this was atypical; he preferred to handle this kind of thing more personally. However, she was not scheduled to be in the office within the next few days; and he wanted to make suggestions before the report was presented to the board.

Network of Contacts

Mintzberg observed that all managers--and, in particular, the superintendent of his study--maintain a complex network of relationships with people within their organization and with a great variety of people outside the organization, as well. Mintzberg found in his study of chief executives that:

an average of 48 percent of their contacts were with subordinates, 7 percent with directors (superiors), and 44 percent with outsiders. Figures for the mail show similar tendencies--39 percent from, and 55 percent to, subordinates; 1 percent from, and 2 percent to, directors; and 60 percent from, and 43 percent to, outsiders (1973, p. 45).

Mintzberg found that a major work difference of the suburban superintendent from the other executives of his study was a higher incidence of meetings with directors and clients as well as other extraorganizational groups. The superintendent:

is continually dealing with the mayor and other municipal authorities, the state education department, the school committee, the parent-teachers association, individual parents, and individual residents (1973, p. 263).

He further notes that his work was characterized by:

relatively frequent contact with the organization's directors. It would appear that the role of the director in overseeing activity and relating it to the wishes of member groups is somewhat more significant in the public organization. . . . The municipal politicians, the parents, state government officials, and a variety of others, all looked carefully over [the superintendent's] shoulder. The decisions that he took in his organization affected the quality of education of students who, for the most part, had no alternative source of formal education. The school committee attempted to reflect the diverse and pronounced concerns of these groups; therefore, the school committee interacted more frequently with the chief executive (1973, pp. 263-4).

Mintzberg makes two points which deserve closer examination because they contradict the findings of this study: (1) managers, and particularly superintendents, spend a substantial amount of time with individuals and groups external to their organization, and (2) the superintendent is in frequent contact with the directors (board of education), and that this contact represents an attempt (on the part of the board) to reflect the "diverse and pronounced concerns of various groups."

An analysis of the verbal contacts (telephone calls, meetings, and tours) revealed that the superintendents spent 73 percent of their time in verbal contact with insiders (subordinates and directors) and 27

percent of their time with extraorganizational groups and individuals. A more detailed breakdown of these contacts is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: VERBAL CONTACTS

	TOTAL NUMBER	TOTAL TIME
Subordinates	73%	54%
Board of Education	8%	19%
Clients	6%	12%
Peer/Professional Organizations	5%	12%
Government	6%	5%
Associates	3%	2%

This breakdown reveals that one-third of the three superintendents' total time is spent with individuals or groups external to the educational organization. Contacts with subordinates are more frequent but are also briefer. A breakdown of the contacts with subordinates by the position of the subordinate in the organization--that is, central office administrator, principal, teacher, secretary, custodian, and so on--revealed the articulation between the superintendent and specific subunits and is reported on Table 5 on page 23.⁹

⁹Although the data from Mintzberg's study are somewhat different from those obtained from this sample, the differences are modest enough when contacts with secretaries are excluded. This reduces the composite contact with subordinates from 72 percent to 60 percent, which is more in line with the 64 percent contact with subordinates reported by Mintzberg. (Mintzberg did not count contacts with secretaries which appeared arbitrary.)

TABLE 5: ANALYSIS OF SUPERINTENDENTS'
CONTACTS WITH SUBORDINATES

	SUPT. A	SUPT. B	SUPT. C	COMPOSITE
Total Number Contacts	84	103	120	307
Number Contacts with Subordinates	69	74	79	222
Central office staff	25%	24%	36%	28%
Principals	9%	43%	34%	32%
Teachers	39%	17%	5%	16%
Secretaries	26%	13%	20%	20%
Other classified personnel (custodians, cooks, etc.)	1%	0%	3%	1%
Teacher(s) and principal	1%	1%	1%	1%
All administrators	0%	1%	1%	1%
Staff (in general)	1%	0%	0%	0%

Although the three superintendents, taken together, engaged in verbal contact a total of 93 hours during the three weeks of observation--or each superintendent a mean of 31 hours per week--the range was 23 to 42 hours and represented 64 to 80 percent, respectively, of the superintendent's working day. Superintendent C worked more hours, spent more time in travel to meetings outside the district, spent more hours in evening meetings and in verbal contact in general. In further comparisons of the verbal contacts, Superintendents A and B spent 63 and 61 percent of their time with

subordinates while Superintendent C spent 37 percent of his time with this group; and Superintendents A and B spent more time with their boards of education. Spending only 42 percent of his time with organizational members (subordinates and the board) freed 58 percent of Superintendent C's time for interaction with extraorganizational groups. Superintendent C spent 34 percent of his time with clients and 10 percent with his peers and professional organizations. Superintendent A spent only 1 percent of his time with clients and 1 percent with peers and trade organizations. Superintendent B, on the other hand, spent 1 percent of his time with clients and 10 percent of his time with peers.

While the people and their organizational affiliation varied, certain patterns emerged with respect to the number of participants in a given social occasion. A majority (70 percent) of all contacts were dyadic. Another 16 percent included more than four people. Typically, unscheduled meetings (and telephone calls) were dyadic; and clocked and scheduled meetings included the larger number of participants.

This seems to make sense. Many of the unscheduled meetings dealt with matters of concern primarily to the individual and the superintendent and would be inappropriate for large group discussions. Likewise, scheduled meetings dealt with organizational concerns--information which must be known or decisions which must be made by a greater number of organizational members. To deal with these matters on a one-to-one basis would be highly inefficient.

The conclusion which Mintzberg draws--a superintendent spends a substantial amount of time with individuals and groups external to the

educational organization--was not supported in this study, except in the case of Superintendent C, a first-year superintendent. Some support for this claim, nonetheless, is found in the professional literature, especially in relation to the "beleaguered superintendent" image fostered by some superintendents. Two contradictory contentions are: (1) that community forces--parents, power elites, school board--are substantial and debilitating factors for the superintendent, and the contrary view (2) that superintendents dominate their boards, but are constrained by a variety of other, extra-community forces (Boyd, 1976). For the three superintendents, community forces were not debilitating factors; they reflected the image of the superintendent revealed in the studies by Minar (1966) and Zeigler, et al. (1977).

Variability in Superintendents' Work.

Accounting for the differences in the work days of the superintendents might be worthwhile. The difference in their tenure perhaps accounts for Superintendent C's spending a greater amount of time establishing his network of contacts and concentrating efforts in developing communication channels. Many of his newsletters and other publications were things which Superintendent A initiated several years ago. The community in which Superintendent B held his position can be described as an outer-ring suburb still experiencing growth while the other two were in various stages of decline. Superintendent A was concerned with maintaining a competitive edge over a nearby private school; Superintendent C wanted to attract childbearing age residents into the community; and Superintendent B was faced with

rapid expansion during a time in which the ideology of decline is promoted. In addition to the contingencies of environment and the tenure of the man in the position, the location of the superintendents' offices influenced activities and appeared to be significant in identifying the superintendent's role.

The offices of Superintendents B and C were in locations which permitted high visibility; they clearly were centers of activity. The positioning of Superintendent B's desk permitted easy eye contact with anyone who entered the front door of the building. His door remained open most of the time except when meeting with subordinates or people outside the organization. (The acoustics were so inefficient that on one occasion the radio was turned on so his staff could discuss secretarial grievances without the fear of being overheard. No one seemed to consider that "turning on the radio" might have been a clue to the secretaries that something they should not hear was being discussed.) The principals' mailboxes were also placed outside his office which "encouraged" principals to visit the annex and enabled the superintendent to maintain close contact with all principals on a daily, informal basis without leaving his office. This arrangement had its drawbacks, for it made it impossible for him to concentrate on one activity for an extended period of time due to frequent interruptions. It took an entire day to write a one page memo to board members because he was interrupted with a constant stream of phone calls and unscheduled meetings.

The very cramped quarters of Superintendents B and C were a contrast with the very neat, spacious and more expensively furnished

office of Superintendent A. It was impossible to be "just passing through" on the way to somewhere else and bump into Superintendent A. Even unscheduled meetings appeared to be "by invitation only." The office itself appeared to be at least three times larger than the others. The desk was located in the rear of the room facing the opened door behind which was a photographic mural of a scene of the Pacific Northwest. Two conversation areas permitted the superintendent to leave his desk for some discussions. The effect of the location and decor of the office was a slower, calmer rhythm which was conducive to thinking, reading, and working out problems of those who came to him for advice. This image was reinforced by the approximately seventy-five volumes in his bookcase among which were Crisis in the Classroom, School is Dead, The Politics of Protest, several works on the non-graded school concept, Early Greek Philosophers, Who Governs?, Suburban Power Structure and Public Education, six years worth of NSSE Yearbooks, stacks of back issues of several professional journals, and two reproductions of abstract paintings.

The books in his office not only were more numerous but were tangible evidence of his advanced graduate work. Of the three superintendents, Superintendent A embraced theory and his graduate training and seemed to miss the intellectual stimulation of the university.

A substantial amount of variability among the contacts of superintendents also stems from variations in "who is attending to what." Decisions about the allocation of attention are primary because they serve as clues about what superintendents (and perhaps school boards) value. They suggest the product of the negotiation of the superintendent's role between the

superintendent and board of education. Differences in the amount of attention superintendents devoted to the incumbents of various organizational positions are significant in light of the various individuals and groups demanding and competing for their attention. The greatest variability was evident in time spent with administrators as opposed to teachers. Contact with administrators (central office staff and principals) accounted for 57 percent of Superintendent A's contact with subordinates, but took up only 34 percent of his time; 74 percent of Superintendent B's contacts were with administrators which accounted for 44 percent of his time; and Superintendent C spent 87 percent of subordinate contacts with administrators which accounted for 71 percent of his time. On the other hand, Superintendent A spent 39 percent of his time, Superintendent B spent 34 percent of his time, and Superintendent C spent 4 percent of his time with teachers.

Another significant difference was in their contacts with administrators as a group: Superintendent B spent 16 percent of his time, and Superintendent C spent 21 percent of his time in contact with all administrators (at one time) in their districts. They referred to these meetings as "Principals' Meetings" and "Administrative Council Meetings," respectively. (Although a more accurate description might have been "Superintendent's Meetings.") These meetings were scheduled and of longer duration, averaging 90 minutes, but differed in their purpose. Superintendent B solicited information from administrators on a proposed change before submitting a report to the board of education, and Superintendent C disseminated information vis-a-vis other administrators in the district in charge of specific objectives.

It appeared that superintendents differed with respect to their interaction with teachers and administrators. While Superintendent C treated principals as conduits for teacher opinions, Superintendent A dealt directly with teachers. Superintendent B met with a small group of dissident teachers after receiving a phone call from their principal arranging the meeting. Superintendent A met with teachers requesting leaves of absence, complaining about colleagues, planning a retirement reception, and requesting permission to organize a field trip to Mexico.

The following incident reflects the extent to which the meeting with teachers occurred "through channels." A teacher brought a travel-study abroad brochure to the superintendent and requested permission to organize a trip for the gymnastic team; the superintendent endorsed it. This superintendent, also, met frequently with teachers having some rank in the teachers' association. Superintendent C was more inclined to invite the incumbents of the leadership positions in the teachers' organization to participate in ad hoc decision making groups as "teachers," not as "spokespersons for the teachers' association." Superintendent C made a clear distinction between "labor and management" and "policy and administration."

It was clear in this study that the superintendents interacted with a wide variety of subordinates and placed different emphasis on formal lines of authority. Superintendent A permitted information to flow directly to him while Superintendents B and C demonstrated a preference for the chain of command to be followed "upwards." None were too concerned about bypassing formal lines of authority (downward) which is consistent with the findings of Mintzberg.

Summary

An analysis of the data collected in the observation of three suburban superintendents revealed specific characteristics of their work. The superintendent's day was characterized by numerous brief episodes in which important and unimportant matters were interspersed. The giving and receiving of information was the superintendent's primary activity; his work was verbal in nature. Superintendents spent a majority of their time within the confines of the school buildings in their districts, predominantly in their offices and with subordinates. Superintendents left their districts for political activities and meetings with their peers; these meetings were more likely to occur at the end of the week.

Much of the activity of superintendents is mundane and never approaches the lofty ideals of leadership. They spend a considerable portion of their time talking with insiders about minor things, making trivial decisions, holding meetings on unimportant agendas, and responding to the little irritants in organizational life. While superintendents were faced with numerous constraints, they did exercise some control over their own work; they initiated the majority of their contacts, created opportunities, and defined long term commitments.

Similar studies of executives in educational institutions (Campbell and Cunningham, 1958; Hemphill and Walberg, 1966; Cohen and March, 1973) show consistently that their work is characterized by variety, discontinuity, and brevity; they make decisions with superficial understanding; and their work is largely verbal in nature.

Suburban school superintendents are not unlike executives of other types of organizations. The frequency and type of activities in which the three superintendents engaged closely resembled the activities of the five managers of Mintzberg's study.

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